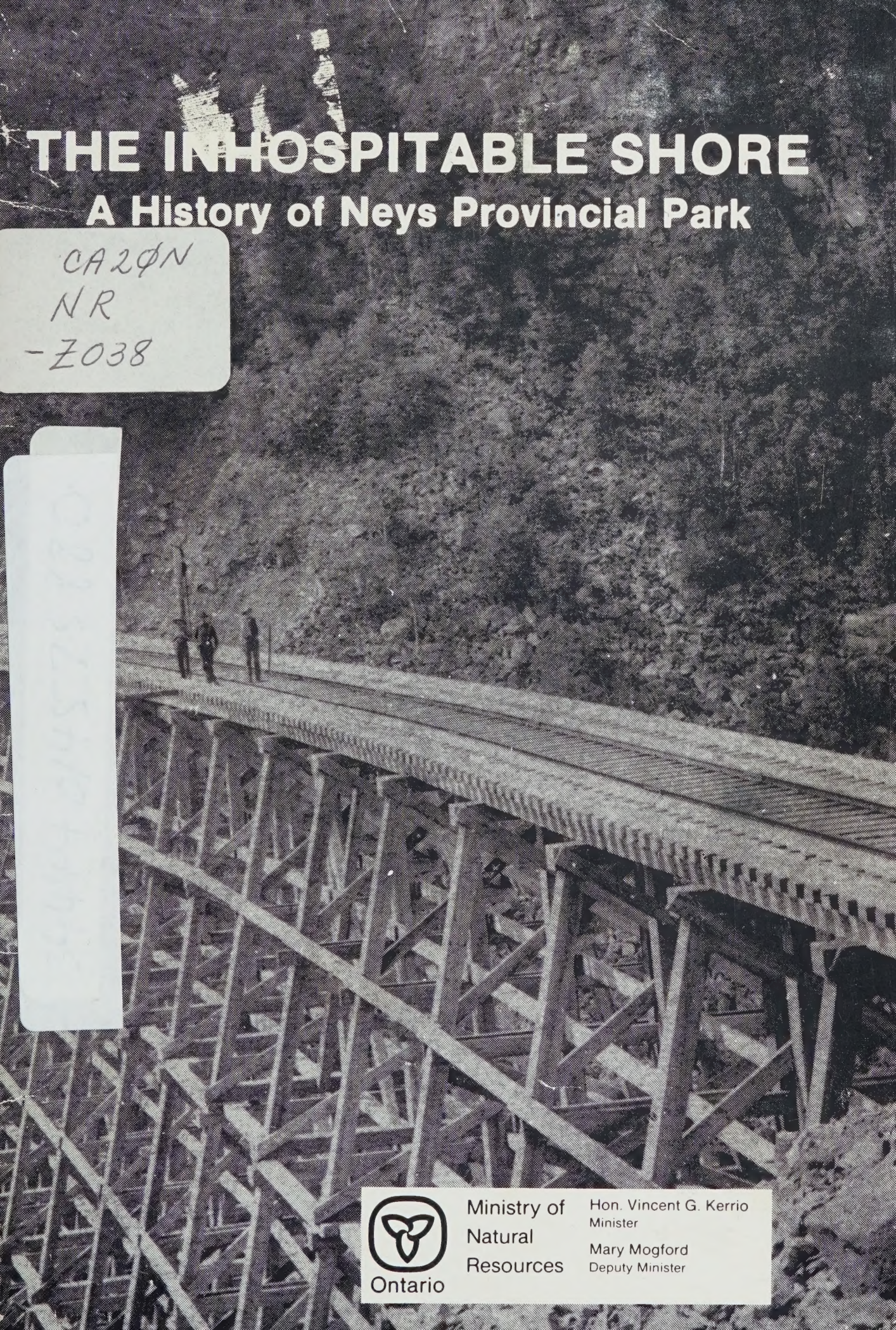
THE INHOSPITABLE SHORE

A History of Neys Provincial Park



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MNR 3847
ISBN 0-7729-2347-7

Printed in Ontario, Canada

Additional copies of this publication are obtained from the Ministry of Natural Resources, District Office, P.O. Box 280, Terrace Bay, Ontario P0T 2W0. Telephone (807) 825-3205.

Cheques or money orders should be made payable to the Treasurer of Ontario and payment must accompany order.

Contents

Foreword

During the summer of 1974, a research project involving the study of historical resources for Neys Provincial Park was carried out by James A. Mountain for the Historical Sites Branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources. The resulting document was entitled, 'The Inhospitable Shore, An Historical Resource Study of Neys Provincial Park'.

As the Visitor Services Programme at the park expanded, and interest in the area's history grew, so did the demand for a more concise account of past human activity at Neys. It is in response to this interest that the Ministry of Natural Resources offers a condensed version of the original document.

This booklet, written by Susan Berlin, is faithful to Mountain's work in its portrayal of the history of Neys park, and contains additional material on the park's prehistory and period of Japanese-Canadian internment.

Chapter 1
Early Days: Survival and Settlement

Since prehistoric times, the fabled north shore of Superior has both sheltered and savaged human lives and hopes. Harsh, unforgiving, yet luminously beautiful and rich in hidden resources, the region has offered survival and settlement to native people, voyageurs, miners, foresters, railroaders, fishermen, - all those bold and stubborn individuals who forever respond to the ambiguous call of the north.

Canada's native people lived along this shore for centuries before the arrival of European traders and explorers. Probably as early as 7,000 years ago, the people known as Palaeo-Indians reached northern Ontario. However, the first evidence of habitation within the Neys Park area dates from about 2,000 years ago. Archaeological sites from both the Laurel culture (200 BC to 1200 AD) and the Blackduck culture (700 AD to 1650 AD) have been found within Neys' boundaries.

These people lived in small groups that allowed them to follow a seasonal round of hunting and food-gathering. They were part of an extensive social and trade network that reached west as far as Manitoba, south into what is now the United States and east to the area of the lower Great Lakes.

In the vicinity of the park are found several sites that contain rock structures known as 'pukaskwa pits'. Occurring at a variety of locations across the north shore, they are stone-lined pits, sometimes of considerable size. What their purpose could have been, however, remains a mystery. They have been variously construed as caribou blinds, canoe shelters, dwellings, vision pits or fish smoke-huts. Although some of these suggestions seem more logical than others, the few pit excavations carried out so far have yielded very little data that could confirm their function.

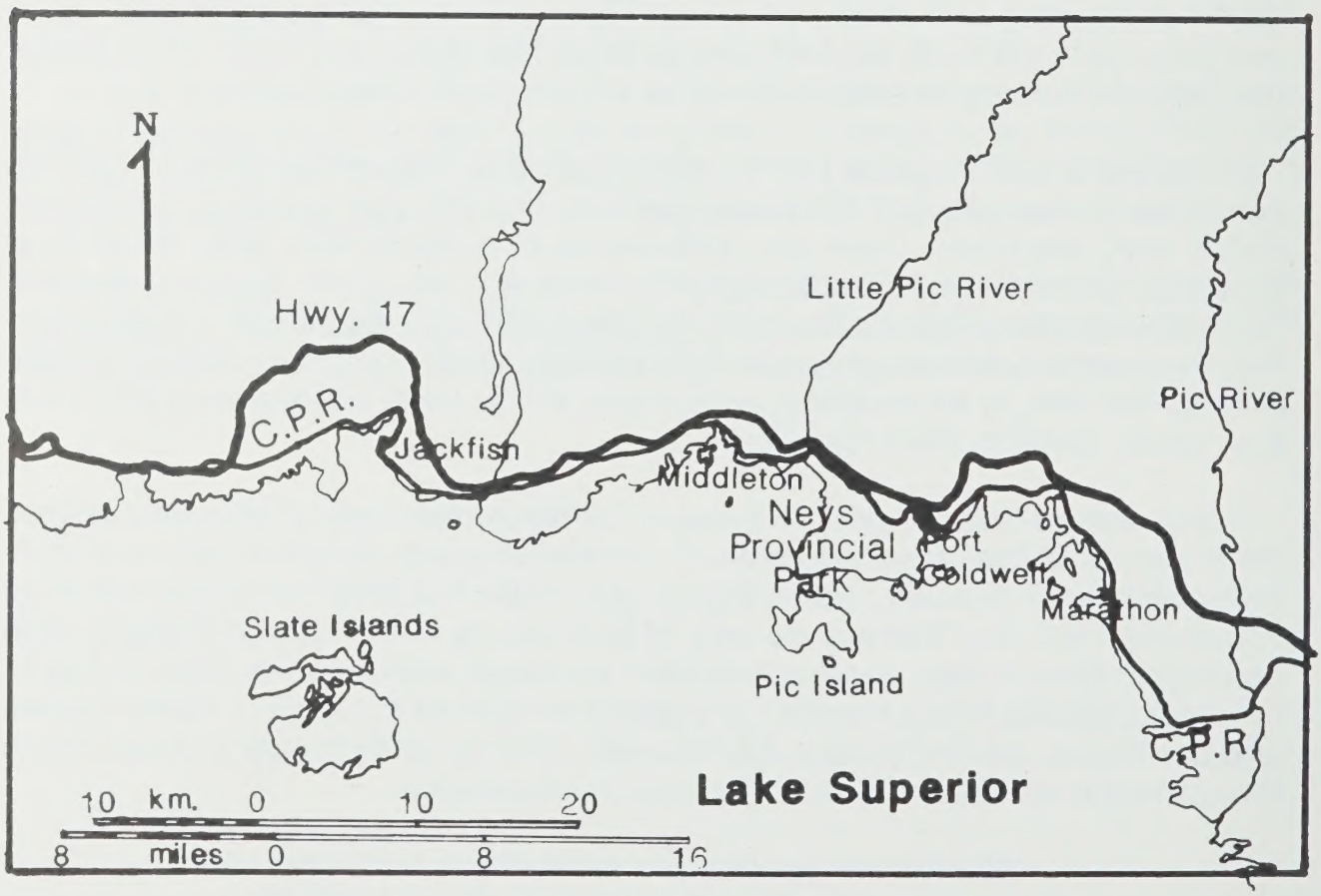
It is assumed that the people living in the Neys area when Europeans arrived were people of the Woodland culture. Archaeological evidence tells us that, in the seventeenth century, native bands camped in the area now known as Neys Provincial Park, but there is no way of knowing to which group these people belonged. Early maps, accounts written by Jesuit missionaries, and fur trader journals indicate that a number of peoples inhabited the region: Cree, Ojibwa and Saulteaux, among others. All, however, lived in small bands and carried on the nomadic existence dictated by harsh conditions.

> "... (the Native people) are divided into small bands of one or two families at most during the winter, they cannot form into large bands because it would be impossible to find subsistence ... their lands abound in rabbits of which they require a large extent of

ground to support a small number of people as (when) they destroy these animals in one spot they have to remove to another spot, in consequence of which they go over a vast extent of ground in one season."[1]

By the latter part of the seventeenth century, the French had explored the Pic River region. The area was "clearly delineated on a map published by the Jesuits in 1670, and based on Father Allouez' circumnavigation of Superior in 1667."[2] The Pic River eventually became part of a canoe route connecting the Great Lakes with the Kenogami-Albany River system that led to James Bay. It was also a part of the Upper Lakes-Quetico route.

In 1763 the British took over New France, and trading attention was focussed on the Upper Great Lakes country and the river systems west of Lake Superior. The Hudson's Bay Company was the dominant force in the fur trade. Nevertheless, 'free' traders operated on the north shore throughout the late 1760's and 1770's. Typical of these traders was Alexander Henry, whose all-consuming quest for furs drew him deep into the Upper Lakes region. In 1775, Henry led an 'outfit' of four canoes and twelve men along the north shore, and on June 21 he reported that:



[1] Donald McIntosh, Report of the Pic Trade and Indians, 1828, Hudson's Bay Company library, unpublished.

[2] Grace Lee Nute, History of the Pic River Area, Minnesota Historical Society, prepared for Marathon Corporation, 1946.

> "... I left the Pijitic, and crossing a bay three leagues in breadth, landed on Pic Island, from Pic Island, I coasted ten leagues and encamped on an island opposite the Pays Plat."[3]

Thus Henry became the earliest recorded visitor to 'camp' close to what is now known as Neys Provincial Park.

The North West Company, formed in 1778 in Montreal, set up small hinterland trading posts to draw trappers away from the big Hudson's Bay Company 'factories' at James and Hudson's bays. 'Free' traders remained active in the inland trade, however, and around 1789, an independent group headed by Gabriel Cotte established a fairly substantial trading post at the mouth of the Pic River. The post consisted of a nine-foot high palisade surrounding a 12 by 36 foot warehouse and a 20 by 30 foot bunkhouse. For nearly all of the next century the Pic River post was active in the fur trade; first under the North West Company from 1799 to 1821 and then in the control of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1821 to 1865. Still later, local histories make sketchy references to the former Hudson's Bay post being occupied by 'free' traders well into the 1880's.

The intensive trapping encouraged by the traders was responsible for a severe depletion of the north shore's fur-bearing animals, particularly the beaver. In 1791 it was noted that the Pic area produced thirty bundles of peltry (slightly above the average return of the six Lake Superior fur-producing areas)[4], but by 1821 the Pic River trader reported that:

> "It is evident from the small proportion of beaver that this district produces, that these animals are nearly destroyed, and from the circumstances of having encouraged the Natives (as recommended by the Hudson's Bay Company 73rd Resolve of Council) to hunt the country on the frontiers as much as possible it is not likely that they will increase; for near the borders of this lake and for a considerable distance inland there is not a beaver to be seen."[5]

During the second decade of the 19th century, the north shore was explored by a number of scientific and survey teams. Dr.J.J. Bigsby, a member of the International Boundary Commission survey, wrote one of the first descriptive passaged about what is now the coastline of Neys Park.

> "... the country here is of a softer aspect than has been the case latterly. The hills swell in gentle

[3] James Bain, editor, Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories by Alexander Henry, Fur Trader, Toronto, 1901.

[4] H.A. Innis, The Fur Trader in Canada, University of Toronto Press, 1930.

[5] McIntosh, Report of the Pic Trade and Indians.

slopes, and are freely wooded with spruce and birch. At a distance from the lake they become loftier and are seen in retiring series."

"Seventeen miles and a half by canoe route, northwest from the River Peek (Pic) is Peek (Pic) Island opposite a lofty and broad promontory of fissured dull-red rock. It is several miles round and has three naked summits. One of these, 760 feet high, I ascended, while our astronomer trafficked for fish with an Indian canoe lying under its lee..."

"Lakewards, the pure blue waters extended shoreless as far as the eye could reach. As I turned toward the land, tall casque-shaped islands were seen here and there bordering the north shore, full of sinuosites and overlooked by pleasingly-grouped hills ... from 600 to 800 feet high ..."[6]

The 'lofty promontory' Bigsby described was undoubtedly the Coldwell Peninsula. The view he saw remains impressive today for those who wish to make the climb.

In 1848, a scientific expedition headed by Louis Agassiz explored sections of the north shore. J.E. Cabot, an American, acted as diarist for the expedition, and reported:

"We stopped for lunch on a point covered with *Vaccinium uliginosum* (blueberries) and similar shrubs. The slimy water plants floating along this point were filled with astonishing numbers of drowned insects and many fine specimens were obtained. From here it was necessary to make a traverse of some three or four miles with quite as much wind as we could stand up to. This brought us into a cluster of islets abreast of Pic Island, a fine bold peak seven or eight hundred feet high, stretching off into a rocky ridge. The whole skeleton and structure of the peak were distinctly visible from the effects of a fire that had streamed up the side of the mountain from a cove on the north, where there is a camping ground. The Indians and voyageurs in their carelessness ... allow their camp fires to extend into the woods, which on these rocky slopes are dry and inflammable."[7]

[6] J.J. Bigsby, The Shoe and Canoe, London, 1850.

[7] Louis Agassiz, Lake Superior, its physical character, vegetation and animals compared with those of other and similar regions, with a narrative of the tour by J. Elliot Cabot, Boston, 1850.

The second half of the 19th century brought a major change in the lives of the native people on the north shore. In 1850, the Superior-Robinson Treaty created a reserve of 800 acres at the mouth of the Pic River; the Ojibwa were required to give up their nomadic way of life and to settle on the reserve lands. It's impossible to say how they made the transition to reserve life, because no reports were published by the Indian Affairs Branch until the early 1870's. By 1882, however, the District Indian Agent commented that "... at the Pic they have erected several buildings ... and have grown a fair crop of potatoes and other vegetables ..."[8] Such comments were more or less standard in an era when building improvements and agricultural activity were seen as evidence of the 'civilizing' process in native communities. Perhaps more indicative of the true state of affairs was a comment by the same agent, in 1883, that "... if the rabbits are not plentiful this coming winter ... (the band) ... will require further assistance."[9]

In that period also, mineral exploration led to some tentative mining ventures in the Neys Park area. Only two proved to be of any consequence; the Little Pic Silver Mine and the Little Pic Copper Mine, both prospected and developed by the McKellar brothers of what was then the town of Fort William (now Thunder Bay).

Operations on the silver mine, located south of Middleton on the CPR line and approximately three miles west of the Little Pic River, began in the summer of 1875. In a report to his associates, Peter McKellar described the first season's work at the mine.

> "According to Agreement on receipt of the first installment of $500.00 cheque from you, I procured 12 men and supplies and started on the 12th of June last ... on Tug **Watchman** to the locations ... distant from Fort William about 150 miles - arriving at our destination of the 14th. We worked steadily without intermission until the 21st of August when work was closed. I returned with all hands and 22 barrels of ore as sample of that from No. 1 shaft ..."[10]

Despite the fact that the returns at first appeared impressive - the yield from shaft No. 1 ran as high as $124.25 per ton - the Little Pic Silver Mine never realized much profit. By 1877 operations at the mine had virtually ceased, and late that year Peter McKellar recommended that the buildings and equipment be moved to the copper mine.

The copper mine included five drilling locations, one of which was five miles west of Neys Provincial Park on a bay that's still called McKellar Harbour. The copper mine was also considered promising at first, with yields ranging from

[8] Sessional paper, Indian Affairs Branch Report, 1882.

[9] Sessional paper, Indian Affairs Branch Report, 1883.

[10] Peter McKellar, "The Little Pic Silver Mine," Thunder Bay Historical Society Report, 1923-24.

$8.00 to $34.00 per ton of ore. McKellar proposed building a mill on-site where the ore could be crushed and concentrated, to reduce the cost of shipping to refineries. Estimated cost of the proposed mill was $6,750.00, but there is no record that it was ever constructed.

Both of the McKellar brothers' Little Pic mines were short-lived, but McKellar Harbour went on to greater fame. In the early 1880's it became the supply depot for the project that dramatically changed life on the north shore; the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Chapter 2
The Coming of the Railway

To persuade British Columbia to enter into Confederation, John A. MacDonald's Conservative Government pledged that construction of a transcontinental railway could begin within two years, and be completed within ten.[11] The Liberal Party leader, Alexander Mackenzie, labelled the promise of a railway "... an act of insane recklessness."[12] Logic was on Mackenzie's side.

> "Here was a country not yet four years old, pledged to construct the greatest of all railways. It would be longer than any line built - almost one thousand miles longer than the first American road to the Pacific which the United States with a population of almost forty million had only just managed to complete. ... the railway ... builders would have to blast their way across seven hundred miles of ... granite wasteland ... After the (pre-Cambrian) shield was breached, the road was to lead across the northwest - a tenantless empire of waving grass ... Every sliver of timber railroad ties, bridge supports, construction materials - would have to be hauled, league after league, across this desolate land... At the far limit of the plains, the way was blocked by a notched wall of naked rock, eight thousand feet high. Beyond that was a second wall and beyond that a third. At the end of that sea of mountains, lay the unknown coastline ...[13]

But Canada's existence as a nation depended on the creation of a railway that could span the continent, and on February 15, 1881, Parliament mandated the construction of the Canadian Pacific line. The rail route, as originally planned, was to run far inland of the lakeshore, perhaps even curving north of Lake Nipigon. Surveyors' reports were unanimous in stating that it was totally impracticable to build a railway along the shoreline. Sandford Fleming, chief engineer for the Canadian Pacific, commented in 1872 that:

> "It was deemed advisable to make the attempt of piercing through the interior at a considerable distance back from the north of the lake, in the hope of finding ground free from those serious obstacles which presented themselves on or near the coast..."[14]

[11] H.A. Innis, A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway, University of Toronto Press, 1923.

[12] Pierre Berton, The National Dream, Toronto, 1970.

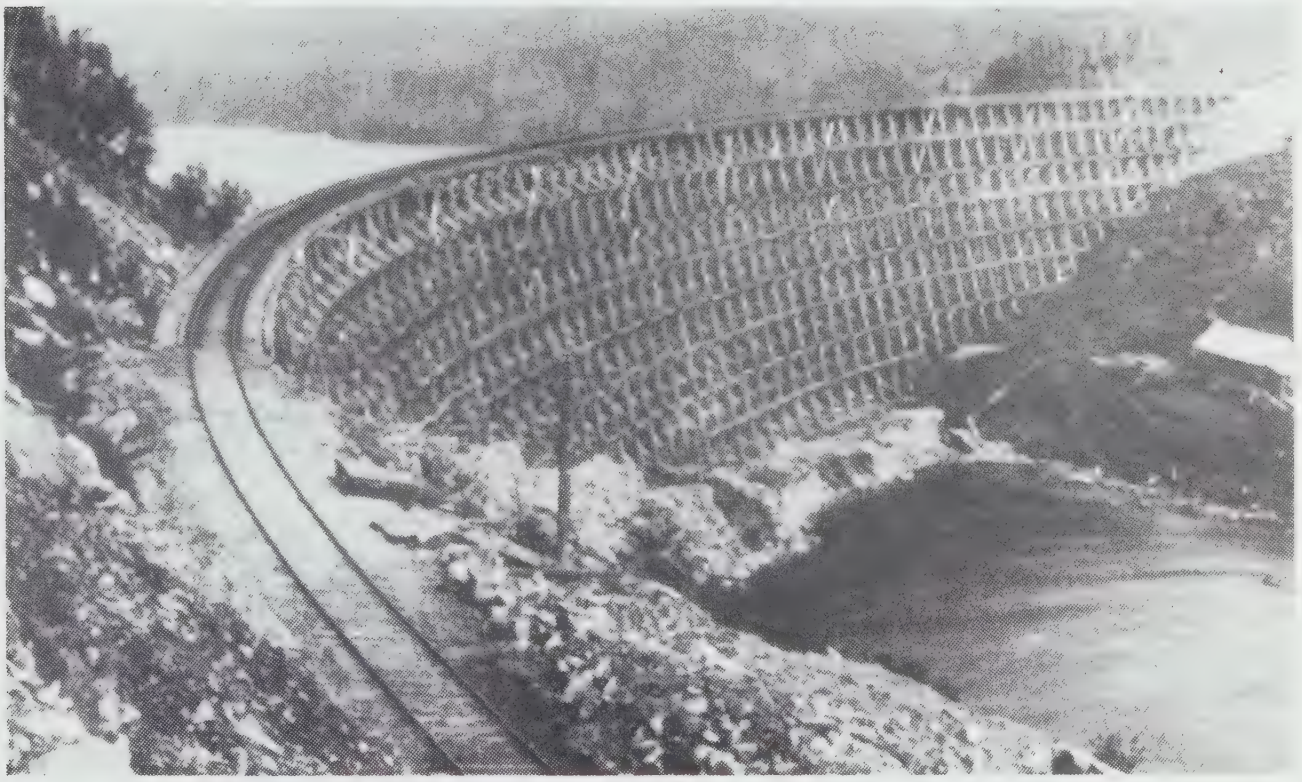
[13] Pierre Berton, The National Dream, Toronto, 1970.

[14] Dr. Elizabeth Arthur, Thunder Bay District, University of Toronto Press.

Typical navvies' accomodations - J. Robinson's camp near Port Coldwell. (Courtesy: Manitoba Provincial Archives).

Navvies working on tunnel near Jackfish, Ontario, 1884. (Courtesy: Ed McKnight Collection).

Steam locomotive on west side of Little Pic River mouth. (Ontario Department of Lands and Forests).



Red Sucker Point Trestle, c. 1885 (Courtesy: Notman Photographic Archives, McGill University).

Nevertheless, there were obvious advantages to a shoreline rail route, chief among them the fact that supplies could be delivered to work sites by ship. By early 1882, the CP syndicate had agreed on a southerly route, with the tracks hugging the shoreline where possible. However, the section of the line running between Red Rock and the Pic River, including the Neys - Port Coldwell portion, posed such complicated engineering problems that by late summer of 1882 its route had still not been defined.

Actual construction of the Lake Superior stretch of the railway was begun in 1883. In that year, several miles of track were built eastward from Port Arthur, and the location of the next 68 miles of track was surveyed. By December of 1884, 67 miles of track had been laid east of Port Arthur, leaving 254 miles of the north shore track still to be built.

Astonishingly, all that mileage was completed by the fall of 1885. Armies of engineers and navvies were delivered to the railway site by steamship. Temporary port towns acquired instant and sizeable populations. Peninsula Harbour (today's Marathon) and Michipicoten were largest of those towns. From 1883 to 1885 they housed, fed and supplied the 12,000 men and 5,000 horses involved in the construction of the north shore line.

Labourers were paid between $1.50 and $2.00 a day, and conditions were rough-edged at best.

> "Because of the isolation, conditions in the camps north of Lake Superior were undoubtedly the worst of any along the line of the railway. The track-laying gangs on the prairies enjoyed the relative comfort of the boarding cars. Together with the mountain crews, they were supplied directly by rail from Winnipeg. But the navvies who drove the steel across the Shield lived in gloomy and airless bunkhouses, which were little better than log dungeons."[15]

Work dominated the life of the camps. No sophisticated machinery was used in the massive construction project. The raw labour of horses and men and the force of crude explosives were the engineers' chief resources.

> "... when one considers that this piece of road ... was really handmade, it puts a different face on it. There was not a single steam shovel, locomotive, crane or power drill on the job... The matter of explosives was settled by making them on the ground at several mills under direction of George MacDonnell. This is the only job on which I have ever seen nitro-glycerin used in liquid form. Much of it of course was made into dynamite; but the class of men using the stuff wanted lots of kick, so they took it straight; and that

[15] Pierre Berton, The National Dream, Toronto, 1970.

> is the way they took their whiskey also. It is a wonder that there were so few accidents."[16]

Life in the camps offered few joys, and it's not surprising that the workers used their cash wages to support illicit whiskey peddlers and the brothels that were a permanent fixture of the shanty-towns all through the construction period.

As the work went on, money problems dogged the project. William Van Horne, the general manager of the CPR, declared in the fall of 1884, "We have **not one** dollar to spare."[17] Construction methods altered visibly as funds became scarcer. The Little Pic River bridge, built early in 1884, is supported by masonry and cut-stone towers. The Red Sucker Point trestle, built later in the year, is a massive construction built entirely of timbers.

In October of 1884, Van Horne wrote the chief engineer of the Lake Superior section that "... the money saved on the Mountain section is being rapidly absorbed by the Lake Superior section, and we are again very near the danger line."[18] Ultimately, the railway project owed its survival to the business acumen of the CP directors, the engineering know-how of Van Horne, the labour of his army of navvies and to an accident of history.

In late March of 1885, the government got word of the Riel Rebellion. Troop reinforcements were badly needed half a continent away. Van Horne saw his opportunity, and promised that the CPR would get troops from Kingston to Qu'Appelle in ten days. He made the railway a sort of mechanical national hero by delivering the first battalions a day ahead of schedule.

The troops endured an epic journey. There were still four gaps on the north shore line. In bitter March weather, facing freezing rain, snow-blindness and a heavy snow storm, men and horses crossed the gaps as best they could. On a 40-mile break between Dog Lake and the aptly-named Desolation Camp, sledges followed a route like "... a roller-coaster path ... that ran over stumps, windfalls and rocks ..."[19] Arriving at Desolation Camp, troops travelled on open-air flatcars to Port Munro, and after that they started on an eight-hour shoreline hike around the promontory of Coldwell Peninsula. There was a third march, and then a final push, from Nipigon to Red Rock, in freezing rain, with the soldiers slogging through deep slush.

> "The rebellion wrenched the gaze of settled Canada out to the prairie country and focused it on the railway ... For weeks the pages of the dailies were

[16] E.A. Lemay, Construction Days on the CPR, unpublished, no date, Thunder Bay Public Library holdings.

[17] Dr. Elizabeth Arthur, Thunder Bay District, University of Toronto Press.

[18] Dr. Elizabeth Arthur, Thunder Bay District, University of Toronto Press.

[19] Pierre Berton, The National Dream, Toronto, 1970.

> full of little else ... But interlaced with such dispatches there was something else - a new awareness of the land and the railway's relation to it, comments on the thoughtfulness and courtesy of the CPR attendants which Van Horne had been at such pains to foster, amazement at the engineering marvels along the lakeshore ..."[20]

One of the results of the Riel crisis was that the financial problems of the CPR were partly alleviated. On July 10, Parliament approved a loan which allowed the last sections of track to be completed. Work on the Lake Superior line was brought to a close on November 2, 1885. The last spike on the Superior section was driven at Noslo, Ontario, west of Jackfish. On the north shore, work crews disbanded and "...everybody had to scrap to get paid."[21]

The dreams spawned by the coming of the railway, dreams of rapid development along the north shore, did not long outlast the dismantling of the shanty-towns. Some settlement did take place around the CPR's coaling and watering stops. Villages like Jackfish, Port Coldwell and Rossport prospered in a small way because their harbour facilities permitted the development of commercial fisheries. As always, some people earned their keep through trapping, running lodging houses or managing stores or hotels.

A monumental effort had gone into the completion of the CPR line across Superior's north shore. But the benefits of the railway largely went to the west. The chief role of the rail line, so painfully pierced through the rock and bogs of the Precambrian shield, proved to be the transporting of immigrants past the shores of Superior and out to the wide span of the prairie provinces.

[20] Pierre Berton, The National Dream, Toronto, 1970.

[21] E.A. Lemay, "Construction Days."

Chapter 3
Forests and Fisheries

In the years immediately following the completion of the railway, the village of Port Coldwell was home to about 135 people. Though the construction of the CPR line had failed to bring massive economic growth to the north shore, nevertheless, it provided access to markets for the lake fishery, and spurred the growth of logging operations in the Neys area.

As early as 1825, the American Fur Company had begun to trade fish - chiefly whitefish - for supplies from the United States. Based at La Pointe and Madeline Island at Chequamegon Bay, and at Grand Portage and Grand Marais on the northwest shore, by 1837 the company was operating three sailing ships that carried salted fish to Sault Ste. Marie for trans-shipment to Detroit.[22] Once the railway was available for shipping the catch, the lake fishery expanded rapidly and Port Coldwell, sited on one of the best natural harbours on the north shore, became a major centre of commercial fishing.

In those days, sailing vessels with crews of only two or three men set out for fishing grounds that could be as much as 25 miles off-shore. The crew would have to sail that distance, haul their nets and re-set them for the next day, and return to the docks to unload and store their catch. In fair weather, this was merely hard work. When Superior produced one of her patented north shore storms, 'miserable' and 'dangerous' were better descriptives. The going rate for whitefish and lake trout was two cents a pound. To earn their wages in the days before mechanically operated net-haulers came into use, fishermen held their hands in warm water to straighten out their cramped fingers.

Some of the flavour of a lake fisherman's life comes through in the stories told by Charles Winterton, who came to Port Coldwell in 1919. At first, he worked as a rock watchman for the CPR, and as a trapper. But he had learned fishing in southern Ontario, and soon he and his wife were running a commercial fishing operation.

Winterton usually set a mile length of gill netting each day, putting the nets down at various depths and locations depending on where trout were likely to be found at different times of the year. He hand-hauled all his nets, a test of skill and strength during a normal lake swell, and a battle during heavy seas.

> "You get a sea on there so you're going way up high and then coming down... I'd wait till I got down, and then I pulled all the slack in. Then I'd bind it to the side of the boat ... and when she'd go up, she'd pull my net up so high, and then I'd wait until she'd start to drop and I'd start pulling to beat hell!"[23]

[22] Graham MacDonald, East of Superior: A History of the Lake Superior Park Region, Historical Sites Branch Report, Ministry of Natural Resources, 1974.

[23] Personal communication, Mr. Charles Winterton, 1974.

The Port Coldwell fishery expanded rapidly after 1915, when the Nicoll brothers set about improving the existing harbour facilities. They installed a net reel dock, an ice house, and a packing house, and operated three fishing tugs: the **Bessie M.,** the **Coldwell** and the **Iris.** The **Bessie M** was the largest of the three and carried 300 pieces of netting, each 600 feet long. As many as 48 to 50 pieces were used in a day's fishing, and each tug was capable of setting seven miles of gill nets. When properly set, the nets would form an eight-foot high 'fence' along the lake bottom. Net sinkers kept the base of the net taut and in position, while cork floats held the top suspended in the water.

The Nicoll brothers acquired a fourth tug, the **Strathbelle,** in 1926-27, and the **Negig** shortly after that. The **Negig** was of a modern, 'closed-in' design, and her arrival caused a minor rebellion among the fishermen. Although all the men earned the same wages, the crew of the **Negig** was spared the wind and spray that the other crews had to deal with. A compromise was reached; canvas screening was stretched along the decks of the other boats, offering at least some protection against the elements.

The Nicoll brothers' boats were also equipped with the newly-invented steam operated net lifters; drum-like mechanisms that radically reduced the sheer labour involved in the commercial fishery and made possible a dramatic increase in yields. That increase, plus the introduction of refrigerated rail cars, was instrumental in creating a major fishery on the north shore.

But the eventual disastrous collapse of the Lake Superior fishery was also due to modernization. The construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950's permitted the sea lamprey to reach Lake Superior. This, plus the pressure of huge annual catches on fish stocks, decimated the lake trout population within a very few years. In the early years of the decade, the trout catch had averaged 1,750,000 pounds annually. The catch fell off dramatically after 1955, and by 1960 only 290,000 pounds were marketed. Sometimes a full net setting, seven miles long, would fail to produce a single lake trout.

The Port Coldwell fishery became a losing proposition, and it was closed down in the early 1960's. The fishery had been the sole livelihood of many Port Coldwell residents, and still others had depended on it in part or indirectly. The consequence of the sea lamprey invasion of the upper Great Lakes was quite simply a disaster for those people and for others like them in the many small communities strung out along the shores of Lake Superior.

With the failure of the fishery, people on the north shore, out of necessity, turned to alternative sources of income. There were few options: working for the CPR, trapping and, increasingly, logging.

Timber operations had been carried out along the north shore for many years. First, by the John Nesbitt Company of Sarnia and later by James Whalen, a Port Arthur contractor who bought out the Nesbitt operation. By 1903, the Lake Superior Timber Company, an American firm based in Detroit, had acquired cutting rights in the area, and those rights eventually passed to the Northern Island Pulp Company. All the pulpwood cut by those companies was sent to mills in the United States.

Fishing boats (left to right: The Coldwell, The Bessie M, The Iris) docked at Port Coldwell.

Reeling fish nets at Port Coldwell.

The Ontario government encouraged logging, but also wanted to have the pulpwood milled in Canada. It offered lavish incentives to American firms to build mills along the north shore, with few results. In 1916-17, the government sold an extensive tract of land along the Pic River to J.J. Carrick of Port Arthur. He soon transferred it to a Wisconsin firm, and after several other transactions, the cutting rights on the tract were sold to the Pigeon River Timber Company, which became the major logging contractor in the Neys area. By 1933, the company had constructed three camps along the Pic River, and three near the mouth of the Little Pic, at Neys Siding on the CPR line.

The camp on the east bank, near the mouth of the Little Pic, functioned as a rafting and boom camp. It was used chiefly in the spring and early summer when the winter's cut was being driven down the river to Lake Superior. Traces of the camp buildings' foundations remain, and decaying rafting boats still perch on the small rock peninsula which forms part of Prisoner's Cove. Huge B.C. fir boom-logs are also visible, piled on the park's picnic grounds, whose site was once the boom-camp itself.

In 1944, the government of Ontario reached an agreement with Marathon Paper Mills, a Wisconsin-based firm, that resulted in the construction of a pulp and paper mill in Marathon. From the mill's opening in 1947, through the late 1950's, pulpwood taken from the company's cutting area was boomed and towed down the Little Pic River to Marathon every summer. With the completion of the Trans-Canada Highway, however, logs were transported by truck, so that for the first time the mill could be supplied year-round.

Young girls with trout on CPR station platform, Port Coldwell, c. 1903.

The 1950's also saw a transformation of cutting practices, with an increasing trend toward mechanization; a trend which continues today. The Canadian woodsman of old is no more, but we are fortunate in having a portrait of that colourful figure provided by artist and writer William Kurelak.[24] As a young man, Kurelak spent the summer of 1946 working in the Pigeon River Timber Company's logging camps north of Neys.

In those days, loggers worked on a piecework system; they were paid $4.50 for each cord of wood cut and piled. Basic working tools, the Swede saw and an axe, were bought by each man at the company store and paid for out of wages. Room and board was charged at $1.25 a day, meals were served en masse, and anyone who slept in or dawdled about returning from work went hungry until the next mealtime.

Traditionally, the logger was a rough-hewn type whose goal was to:

> "... work hard, save up, then go to town ... and, in a few days or weeks, let the women and taverns clean out your pockets. Afterwards, with a devil-may-care attitude, you retire to the woods to make another stake."[25]

But in the years following the Second World War there was another type of bush-worker. Many immigrants worked as loggers to gain a foothold in the new world, as they sought new lives in Canada after the devastation of the war. The carefully-saved wages of those immigrants of forty years ago were used to establish families, homes and businesses all over Canada.

Port Coldwell at the turn of the century was a very different place than it is today. The oldest structure in the town was the general store which was built during the railway's construction days "... when it served as a government-operated central warehouse, supplying the railwaymen with liquor."[26] According to Mrs. Kathleen Allan (a school teacher and daughter of Thomas Nicoll, the founder of the Nicoll Brothers Fish Company) the original storekeeper kept up the railway tradition by having a stock of liquor on hand, stashed in an assortment of teapots lined up on one of his shelves. "If you were very thirsty you came and you told him what your preference was and he got down the right teapot!"[27]

Mrs. Allan, herself, was the last proprietor of the general store, from 1934 to 1963. She sold clothing, hardware items, and staple foods. In summer, she traded with people from the Pic River Indian Band for the huge quantities of blueberries that they harvested in the Coldwell area. The native families would

[24] William Kurelak, Lumberjack, Toronto, 1974.

[25] William Kurelak, Lumberjack, Toronto, 1974.

[26] J. Boultbee, Pic, Pulp and People, 1967.

[27] Personal communication, Mrs. Kathleen Allan.

arrive in late summer, when "... a whole little village (of tents) would spring up ... in a day."[28] One season's harvest could produce nearly 15 tons of berries, which were then shipped by rail to the Saskatchewan Fruit Company in Saskatoon.

The Port Coldwell boarding house, built in 1904 by a Captain Titus, was a two-storey log building that served northern travellers: mounties, mining men, preachers and loggers. Only the foundations of the building remain visible today.

The town's first school was run in a small chapel built by Reverend Neilly of Port Arthur. It was replaced by a government school, but that, too, was abandoned as the number of students dwindled.

For Mrs. Allan and the other residents of Port Coldwell, the completion of the Trans-Canada highway in 1957 marked the end of the town's prosperity. Tourists travelling by car passed up the village for larger and better-advertised centres, and local people slowly moved away, seeking their livelihoods elsewhere.

[28] Personal communication, Mrs. Kathleen Allan.

Chapter 4
Neys Camp 100: 1940-1946

The British Home Government was largely responsible for constructing the first camps for war prisoners in Canada. Once German forces took control of western Europe in 1939-40, Britain became concerned about maintaining security in her internment camps, and asked the Canadian government for help. To quote a report of the Department of National Defence in Ottawa, "The Director of Internment Operations was confronted with the problem of housing some 6,700 interned persons of various categories ..."[29]

Thus, in the early years of the war, the Department of National Defence was hastily called upon to look for suitable PoW camp sites. Attention was drawn to Neys because the CPR line provided direct access to the site, and because some living quarters and warehouses already existed. The isolated site was considered naturally secure, and construction of Neys Camp 100 was begun shortly after the start of the war.

A camp site of some 422 acres was first stripped of all vegetation, exposing a vast area of fine beach sand. Altogether, 27 prison structures were erected. They included: seven large, H-shaped barracks buildings with washrooms and laundry facilities; two hospitals (one run by the medical corps and one by the prisoners themselves) and a medical supplies building; a mess hall; a guard house and a recreation hall (including an ice rink and soccer field). A series of three ten-foot high barbed-wire fences, overlooked by four guard towers, surrounded the buildings.

Barracks for the guards and officers were constructed outside the fenced prisoners' compound. A generator plant, a machinery maintenance shed, a fire station and a building that housed the camp commandant's office were also built.

The first prisoners interned at Neys were German merchant seamen captured in the Atlantic by the British at the outbreak of the war. In 1941, these seamen were transferred from Neys to a camp in New Brunswick, and were replaced by **Kreigsmarine** (German navy) and **Luftwaffe** (German air force) prisoners.

In May of 1943 the federal government passed an Order-In-Council permitting the employmnet of volunteer PoWs on labour projects outside the internment camps. Volunteers were to be paid 50 cents a day. Soon afterward, compulsory employment of PoWs was instituted - a reflection of the demand for labour in a wartime economy. For the remainder of the war, PoWs were a major source of manpower in northwestern Ontario's logging industry. The Pigeon River Timber Company, operating in the Neys area, was quick to make use of prisoner labour. In 1943, of the 98,000 cords of pulpwood harvested by the company, 90,000 were cut by prisoner labour.

[29] Report, Federal Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 1969.

Pigeon River Timber set up seven bush camps about 16 miles north of the internment camp. Altogether, the logging camps could handle 750 PoWs. Logging offered the prisoners physical activity and paid employment, even if at minimal rates, and the bush camps do not seem to have been unpleasant places. Groups of prisoners working in the bush were generally accompanied by four or five guards, even though they weren't inclined to escape. Blackfly summers, harsh winters and the deep isolation of the bush camps were natural deterrents. The few who did try to flee became object lesson to their peers.

> "The first break out as I recall it was on a pay day ... Apparently two young sailors took off over the mountain in the direction of Port Arthur. However, before sundown they were back, unrecognizable because of the way the blackflies had a field day... they had no way of knowing about blackflies."[30]

A number of photographs survive from the camp period, many of them showing prisoners involved in various kinds of athletic-team activities. Prisoners were free to mail such snapshots home to their families through the Swiss consulate. This was a mild form of propaganda, since they showed the prisoners to be healthy, and engaged in recreational programs.

Altogether, life in the PoW camps across Canada couldn't have been an entirely negative experience. The Department of National Defence noted that "... most of the escape attempts (600 were reported overall) were made subsequent to the collapse of Germany, by prisoners of war who wished to remain in this country rather than be repatriated."[31] In fact, a sizeable number of PoWs who were repatriated eventually returned to Canada as immigrants.

The last PoWs were shipped out of Neys Camp 100 in March, 1946. Later that year, Neys was re-opened to become one of the last stopping places in the history of Japanese-Canadian re-settlement during the Second World War.

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbour in December of 1941, there were some 23,500 people of Japanese descent living in Canada; 95 percent of them in British Columbia, mostly along the coast. Of that number, 6,700 were native-born Canadian citizens, another 7,000 were citizens through naturalization, and the rest were nationals of Japan, mostly long-resident in Canada.

Despite the fact that there was never any evidence of disloyalty among members of the Japanese-Canadian community, all of them, citizens and non-citizens alike, had their property confiscated and sold, and were moved away from the coast. Many families were split up, the men going to work camps, the women and children to isolated barracks-like communities.

[30] Letter, B. Fairrie to K. Johnson, November 25, 1973.

[31] Report, Federal Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 1969.

Prisoners of war loading pulp logs onto sleigh.

Neys Camp 100 with Coldwell Peninsula on the horizon.

Neys Camp 100 soccer team.

Neys Camp 100 orchestra.

In the summer of 1946, Neys became a sort of staging point from which separated family groups were eventually re-united. Although the camp was not patrolled (children played in the former guard towers) its isolation alone was a potent force and people remained within the fenced grounds.

Few families stayed for more than a few months; many eventually were moved to Camp 72, farther up the Pic River, which had been a work camp for men. Each year, however, a few of the people who lived briefly in Neys Camp make a visit to the park.

They do not see the buildings they remember. Neys Camp was used for a little while as an extension of the Fort William Industrial Farm for short-term prisoners, then finally abandoned in 1948 and dismantled shortly afterward. The fine beach sand on which the camp was built began to drift over the site, and eventually the whole area was re-forested.

Today, the only physical remains of the internment camp are several concrete foundation blocks, and some twists of rusted barbed wire scattered behind the campgrounds. The awesome power of Lake Superior has swallowed up most traces of past human activity. The inhospitable shore has taken back its own.

Neys Provincial park was established in 1964, after the area had been opened to the public for camping and picnicking in 1963. It is classified as a Natural Environment Park, and its chief attraction is the extraordinary shoreline of Lake Superior. An interpretive program, including guided hikes and evening programs, is offered by the park's Visitor Services staff.

Prisoners of war with Nellie, their pet black bear.

MNR 3847
ISBN 0-7729-2347-7